



State of Arizona
Department of Education
John Huppenthal
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Before You Apply

Before you apply there are some questions that you must ask yourself: (1) Is my child eligible? (2) If so, will I home school or seek placement in a private or online school? (3) What will the amount of the scholarship be and will it be enough? (4) What will I be responsible for as a parent if I accept this award?

Eligibility

Eligibility is undoubtedly the first question you should be trying to answer as a parent. There are only **two ways** an applicant can qualify for this program.

- 1) Be enrolled as a **full time** student in an Arizona public or charter school for the **first one hundred days the prior school year** or;
- 2) Have received a **Displaced or Disabled Scholarship from a Student Tuition Organization (STO)** the prior year.

The majority of applicants will qualify under the first rule (The 100 day rule); few qualify as an STO recipient. These are just the preliminary checks and not every contingency can be planned for. However, this rule makes up the majority of denials each application cycle. For a complete list of denial reasons please [click here](#).





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What You Need To Do

If you're unsure that your child qualifies under the 100 day rule go to your child's school district office or school and ask about his enrollment last year. The question should be: "Was my son enrolled full time last school year through the 100th day?" This simple check can save you time and the hassle of an application.

If your child received an STO scholarship last year, check which kind of STO by locating your paperwork, speaking to the STO provider or by contacting the [Department of Revenue](#) (DOR) and asking "Was my STO scholarship a Displaced & Disabled scholarship?" The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) does not hold this information and obtains it through DOR during the application process.

FAQ's About Eligibility

- [My child just entered Pre-school in January and could not accumulate the full 100 days, do she still qualify?](#)
 - Unfortunately, if the students was not enrolled in a public school 100 days the prior school year then that student does not qualify for an ESA scholarship.
- [We changed schools and there was a gap in enrollment, does my son qualify?](#)
 - This question must be reviewed on a case by case basis by reviewing enrollment data provided by the district. Since the statute requires enrollment for the first 100 days of the school year, ADE is bound by that rule. However, enrollment does not mean attendance and a student is only disenrolled from school if they do not attend for ten consecutive days. If you feel that this may be the case please contact your school and ask the question "Was my child enrolled for the first 100 days of school?"
- [My son is sick and often misses days in school, does he still qualify?](#)
 - Yes, if he does not miss ten consecutive days without school permission then he would still qualify for the ESA program; attendance is different from enrollment.
- [I have just moved to the state, does my child qualify?](#)
 - In order to qualify for the ESA program a student must have attended an Arizona public school the prior year. Children from out of state would need to enroll in a public school for at least the first 100 days before they would be eligible for the ESA program.





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- [I enrolled my child late after school had already begun, does she qualify?](#)
 - This must be determined on a case by case basis by reviewing district enrollment data. As a rule, a district will not count you as a late enrollee unless you do not attend the first ten days of school. Please contact your local district or school to determine enrollment status.

Choosing A Private/Home School or Online School

The ESA programs main purpose is to provide options for parents to freely choose how and where to educate their child without the help of the state. The ESA parent will take on the responsibility for not only providing “reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science,” but also for ensuring that their child is placed in an environment that meets the specific needs of his disability. Here are three common approaches that have been used by other ESA parents:

Private School

Enrolling your child in a private school is the most common way ESA funds are spent. Private schools can sometimes offer smaller class sizes or specialized education that cater to specific disabilities. Research which private schools you are looking at beforehand, call them and consider include the following questions:

- “Is your school familiar with the ESA program?” (if “No” then direct them [Here](#))
- “Does your school accept Debit Cards or online payments through Pay Pal?” (These questions will be explained under the expense report section)
- “Will your school be able to provide receipts that show quarterly expenses?”
- “Is your school willing to structure tuition payments on a monthly or quarterly basis?”
- “Does your school provide the services required for my child’s needs outlined in her IEP or MET?”

Many of the private school’s tuition costs will be more than the ESA scholarship amount. Be sure to look at an [ESA scholarship estimated award chart](#) (*The ESA award chart shows monies that are above and beyond the base funding level that begins at \$1,600.00*) while researching which school to choose. ADE





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cannot recommend a specific school to attend and it is the responsibility of the applicant parent to determine placement.

Home Schooling

Homeschooling is another option under the ESA program. But ESA funds are restricted to be used on approved expenses that are outlined in the law. If you intend to apply and use the home school option, please read carefully the list of [approved expenditures](#).

What You Need To Do

- Find a curriculum ahead of time that you would like to purchase.
- Read the approved expenditures list very carefully and be sure that those approved expenses meet with your planned purchases. Understand that absolutely no **hardware may be purchased** (chairs, desks, computers, pens, pencils etc.) that isn't curriculum.
- Find accredited tutors and be sure they are equipped to accept online payments through Pay Pal.

FAQ's About Home Schooling

- [What is the definition of curriculum?](#)
 - Curriculum is an approved expense under the ESA program, but since it is not clearly defined in statute ADE has provided a definition:
"Curriculum is generally defined as a complete course of study for a particular content area or grade level." Curriculum, as defined by the department, may include a set of math books or english texts. It does not include supplemental material that is not part of a "complete course of study." For example, you can buy the "Saxon Grammar" curriculum, but not "Cat In The Hat" as it is not a part of a "complete course of study." ADE does allow the purchase of some supplemental reading materials if they are required by the textbook. For example, your English text may require you to read "The Tale of Two Cities" or other stand alone classics.
- [Can I take my child places like the Zoo or Science Center using ESA funds?](#)
 - Field trips are not an eligible expense. However, there are educational classes that are held at places like the science center. If one of these are attended they must be included in your quarterly expense report under "tutoring" which also requires proof of accreditation by the instructor.





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- [Why are the funds restricted?](#)
 - The ESA program diverts public school dollars for the benefit of educating special needs children in a private or home school setting. The Arizona Department of Education in conjunction with the Arizona State Treasurer's Office is entrusted with ensuring that public tax dollars are spent in accordance with the law. ESA debit card restrictions are put in place to ensure monies that flow from the ESA program are spent to expand educational choice to parents and children but also to provide assurance to Arizona tax payers that all ESA funds are appropriated correctly.
- [Can I buy books that aren't part of a curriculum if they're educational?](#)
 - The ESA statute does not allow books to be bought piecemeal. However, if a textbook, that is part of a curriculum, requires additional reading of a classic (or other literature piece), that does fall under approved curriculum and may be purchased.
- [What about science projects?](#)
 - In order to purchase any educational product it must fall under one of the approved expenditures. Science projects may be purchased only under the "curriculum" provision. To meet the definition the science project must be bought as part of a larger course of study for a specific grade level-- it may not be purchased as a stand alone product.
- [Can I bank the money in a 529 college savings plan?](#)
 - Yes. The ESA program allows parents to use disbursed monies to put into a 529 college savings plan. Currently, ADE is working with the Arizona State Treasurer's Office to make this possible. Until the process is complete you may roll over unspent funds to the next quarter that you have set aside for the 529 savings plan. ADE will notify parents through e-mail when ESA debit cards can be used for 529s.
- [Is there recommended curriculum given by ADE?](#)
 - No, ADE does not promote any particular private school or vendor.
- [Are there other ESA homeschooling parents that I can connect with?](#)
 - Yes, please consider joining the ESA [Parent Group](#) or visiting the [Arizona Families for Home Education](#) website.

Hybrid Approach

Some ESA parents have taken a hybrid approach to educating their children using the ESA scholarship. Some have used a combination of online, home schooling and private tutors to customize their own approach to educating their child.

What Will The Amount Of The Scholarship Be?





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Each scholarship amount will be different based on the "School Funding Formula" (The same formula that public school students are funded on). Although there are many factors that go into creating the final number; the main determining factor is "Primary Determination/Category." This is based off of the child's [IEP](#) or [MET](#) that is developed by the district. The [estimated funding chart](#) can give a ballpark figure based on each disability category.

FAQ's About Funding

- [What if I want to buy books and other things ahead of time? Can I reimburse myself?](#)
 - No, the statute requires that parents may not be reimbursed for expenses-- you must use the ESA pre-paid card. If ADE is late disbursing funds and you need to make tuition payments please contact ESA staff.
- [Is the chart right in saying some children only receive \\$10?](#)
 - Yes, but the [estimate chart](#) is additional money that every ESA student receives on top of the baseline amount which is ~\$3,400 for most students.
- [I've been fighting with my district to get the determination changed on the IEP, can you fund him at that level if I have other documentation saying should be in a different category?](#)
 - ESA staff must defer to the district IEP team when disability categories are in question. Other documentation is not considered when funding ESA accounts.
- [Can I accept an ESA scholarship and an STO scholarship at the same time?](#)
 - No, an ESA scholarship and an STO scholarship may not be used concurrently. Use of an STO scholarship while on the ESA program will disqualify you from receiving funds.

Responsibility Of The Parent

By accepting an ESA award a parent is releasing the public school system from educating their child and signing a one year [contract](#) with ADE to provide educational service. In addition, becomes the steward of public funds and are required to submit quarterly Expenditure Verification (EV) forms to ADE. A parent of an ESA child must coordinate:

- 1) Payments to schools, vendors, tutors, educational therapists as well as submitting [quarterly expense reports](#) and receipts to ADE.
- 2) Administer all ESA funds in a lawful manner.
- 3) Ensure that their child receives instruction in math, science, social studies, reading and grammar.





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